Asian Studies Unit Term 1 2011

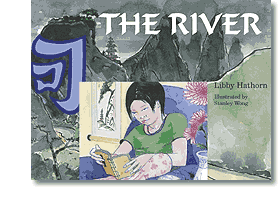
Teacher Information

This unit will run for about three weeks and continue to explore aspects of water.

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**Overview**

This interesting picture novel is set in China and relates the story of Xian, who undertakes a long and hazardous journey to reach the village of her grandparents after her mother has died. Modern-day Hong, the girl reading the story given to her by Ming (a woman who has worked as a cleaner in Hong's parents' shop), is transported back in time by the adventures of Xian. Hong is enthralled by the story and sees it as an important telling of where you belong. She lives in comfortable circumstances but from the reading of the precious story given to her, she decides to create a story of her own family - a treasure of her own. The story is multi-layered and intergenerational with interesting adventures and concepts. It is complex enough to be enjoyed by upper primary students.



*The River* is presented in different voices and in different times. It deals with the continuity of life as represented by the river, which provides a guide for a young Chinese girl, Xian, on her journey to her  grandparents’ home. The setting in China and the portrayal of a different culture, traversing both modern and old, introduces Australian students to Asian images and customs. The visual images complement the text and heighten understanding.

Drawing on the power of the imagination, *The River* presents characterisation (resourcefulness, determination, resolve) and life in China (religion, ways of living) in words and pictures to provide a rich reading experience.

*The River* is a starting point for numerous questions and discussion topics in the classroom, such as what images convey; the importance of history; belonging and fitting in; design, layout and placement of text; use of contrast; the wisdom of older people; atmosphere and mood; writing style. The wider concepts of visual literacy can be discussed to ascertain what and how they contribute to the overall reading of a book.

**Activities**

* Tell the story in your own words.
* Make a map of the story.
* Draw your own map of Xian's journey.
* What is the purpose of Xian's journey?
* Do a character study of Xian saying what she looks like and what she is like as a person.
* Tell of two adventures that Xian has on her journey.
* Where is the story set? Is there more than one setting? Describe the different settings.
* Describe Xian's journey, telling where she went and describing the weather and terrain through which she passed.
* Write about whom she met on the way and what people were like and how they treated her.
* Why is the story called *The River*? Explain the significance of the river for Xian.
* When Ming gives the story to Hong she says, 'The story is about a treasure'. Explain.
* What does the story do for Hong?
* Make a list of the characters in *The River* and their place in the overall story.
* Why is Xian so upset when she finally reaches her grandparents' home?
* What does Xian's grandfather mean when he says, 'She has surely brought us a treasure'?
* What gift does Xian's grandfather say he will give to his granddaughter? Why is this so special? What will Xian write about?
* What is important for Hong's parents? What is important for Hong?
* What happens in the end? Does the story have a happy ending? Give reasons for your answer.
* Like Hong, use the Internet to find out more about China.
* Write a family treasure of your own - your own family history.
* Look up more information on Libby Hathorn and Stanley Wong.
* Write about the power of story and the imagination.

**Lesson 1. The River**

1. **Introduction and Aims**

Suggested time allocation: 35 mins

Explain to participants that the following activities are designed to introduce participants to *The River* by Libby Hathorn and allow them to develop connections to classroom programs.

Outline the Aims of the session using [OHT 1](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/for_teachers/professional_learning/the_river_pl/the_river_pl_resources/trpl_oht_1.html).

Distribute copies of the text and allow a few minutes for participants to look through it.

1. **Book Orientation: individual activity**

Ask participants to relate briefly what they know about Libby Hathorn and her work (e.g. an Australian writer, writes for both children and young adults, her books include …).

Alternatively, allow participants time to explore Libby Hathorn's website at: [www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/index.html](http://www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/index.html) and then get them to relate what they know about Libby and her work.

Ask participants to open the book to look at the front and back covers. Have large sticky notes on tables to cover the 'blurb'. Using the visual information (pictures, graphic symbols) work in pairs to make predictions about the book's:

* + setting (time and place)
  + characters

Ask participants to identify the cues (items, symbols) that are prompting their responses. Acknowledge participants' prior knowledge.

Uncover the 'blurb' and use the information to confirm, alter and expand predictions.

1. **Classroom connections**

Small group activity

This activity is designed to focus participants' attention on possible connections between *The River* and their own classroom connections.

Hand out Resource 1 to participants. Ask them to fill in possible connections that they could make between *The River* and their teaching programs as the session continues. Indicate that some notions from the book orientation are included and that participants may wish to add some more ideas at this stage. Allow two or three minutes for this to occur.

Ask participants to flick through the pages of *The River* to page 17 in order to gain an impression of the setting and events of the story, spending no more than ten seconds on each double page.

Divide participants into small groups of no more than four or five people. Allocate each group a double page from the book to be their focus. Choose from pages 4 & 5, 10 & 11, 14 & 15, 16 & 17, 20 & 21, 22 & 23, 26 & 27, 28 & 29.

Ensure that pages allocated are from both the present and past settings contained in the text. Request that one person from each group acts as a scribe.

Allow a few minutes for groups to examine their pages thoroughly, focusing on both the written and visual texts.

Tell groups that their task is to list ideas and areas of interest found on their two-page spread that would warrant further comment and investigation within classroom settings. Allow five minutes for this discussion.

Ask a member of each group to act as a reporter from the group. Be ready to note ideas on a whiteboard or overhead transparency (or appoint a volunteer to do this).

Ask each reporter in turn to relate one idea from his or her group. Continue around groups until all ideas are exhausted.

Refer participants back to their 'Classroom connections' sheets and ask them to fill in spaces to include ideas that they would use in their own contexts.

1. **Book review extract and conclusion**

Whole group activity

Acknowledge that in this session there has not been time to engage with all significant themes found in the text. Indicate that a number of important themes are to be found in *The River* and that a brief extract from a review of the book can provide a 'taste' of these for possible further investigation.

Conclude by reading extracts from a book review of *The River* by Nancy Mortimer (Resource2). Allow a moment for participants to note or briefly mention anything from the review that caught their attention.

Libby Hathorn's home page has sections that provide information about her books, her life as author, Frequently Asked Questions, as well as an autobiography: [www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/index.html](http://www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/index.html)

**ART PROGRAM BASED ON THE RIVER BY LIBBY HATHORN**

**This activity should run for about 2-3 weeks. It will focus on the way that water, especially the river has been represented by Chinese artists in the past. We will look at Stanley Wong’s representation of the river in Libby Hathorns and compare them with those of the ancient Chinese artists.**

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| **Name** |
| **USING WATERCOLOURS TO PAINT RIVERSCAPES.**   * 1. **Look at the pictures of Australian, European and Chinese riverscapes. What things are similar, what is different? What kind of paint is used? How is water represented? What is the significance of the composition of the painting?**   **List your ideas here**    **-----------------------------------------------------------------------**  **-----------------------------------------------------------------------**  **-----------------------------------------------------------------------**  **-------------------------------------------------------------------------**     * 1. **Use the internet to look at some other Brush painting works. E.g. Cameron Johnson at myvirtualgallery.agnsw.net.**   **What did you find?**   * 1. **Look at Google Earth and bring up images of the big rivers in China.**   **Which rivers did you look at?**  **-----------------------------------------------------------------------**  **How are they different from our rivers?**  **-----------------------------------------------------------------------**    Painting with Water Colour   1. Do some experimenting with your water colour on some scrap paper. Try to make different size brush strokes by applying more or less pressure. Paint in a coloured area, then wait for it to dry and then create a darker line to emphasis the shape. E.g. a light purple swish for a mountain and then a fine darker purple line to show the edge between the mountain and the sky. Try wetting your paper first and then painting to give a soft blurry effect. This works very well in the sky.    1. **Turn your paper portrait or even make it into a scroll shape by cutting some paper away.**    2. **Consider some of the aspects of your river e.g. the perspective of the mountains and how the river starts as a small line in the back ground. As things get further away they become softer and less distinct. Remember you can’t always see all of the river.**    3. **Think of something such as a boat, or a tree to put in the foreground of your work.**    4. **If you are really adventurous, you might like to try and merge the Chinese style of painting with interpreting the Mitchell River or some other local river.**    5. **When you have completed your painting, think about how you might mount and display your work. Have another look at how work is displayed in the Chinese painting book. Do you need some words down the side? In Chinese painting the characters describe the work and the red seal or“Chop” is the artists’ signature.**    6. **You can make your own seal “Chop” from a carrot. Dip it in red paint and print your name.**    7. **Look at your work; does it look like what you first had in mind? Do you like it? What would you do differently next time?**   **Write about how you feel about your work.** |